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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EEB/TPP/MTAA/ABT - MSZYMANSKI AND JBOBO
USDA/FAS/OSTA/GILBERTA
USDA/FAS/OCRA/LUCHOKD
HO CHI MINH CITY FOR USDA MICHAEL RIEDEL
CHIANG MAI FOR KROSIER
DEPARTMENT FOR EB/TPP/ABT/BTT
EB/TPP/ABT/BTT/JFINN
EB/TPP/ABT/BTT/GCLEMENTS
FAS/OSTA/MHENNEY
DEPT PASS TO USTR/WEISEL

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [TBIO](#) [KPAO](#) [BEXP](#) [SENV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: BANGKOK PROPOSAL: 2009 AG-BIOTECHNOLOGY OUTREACH FUNDS

REF: A) Bangkok 0111 and emailed Conference report to EEB; (B) 09 Bangkok 2551; (C) 09 STATE 122732 (D) 09 Bangkok 0141; (E) 09 State 94920 (F) Phnom Pehn 0128

11. SUMMARY: Embassy Bangkok requests \$20,000 in funding from the Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs' (EEB) agricultural biotechnology outreach funds for FY2010. EEB's funding would support a workshop on the intersection of biotechnology, food security, rice production and the four lower Mekong countries. Post will also seek IIP speaker program funds to bring two U.S. speakers to this workshop. Participants would include scientists and agricultural policy officials from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The two-day workshop would seek to identify the threats to rice production from climate change and from water infrastructure management; update on rice biotech advances; show how biotechnology can help solve food security issues; how biotech products can improve export prospects; update on agricultural trade policy; and how wetlands and protected area management should connect to agricultural biotechnology. The conference would be in Bangkok and would synchronize with the environment and education pillars of the Secretary's Lower Mekong Initiative. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND - BIOTECH AND THAILAND

12. Thailand is an important but difficult locale for biotech outreach. (Refs B and D) As the world's number one rice exporter, it is a key nation for regional food security. Climate change threatens rice production via projected increases in flooding and drought, as well as salinization of the Chao Praya waterway. There is substantial biotech agricultural research in Thailand, but policy lags over unsubstantiated concerns about safety for humans and the environment, and misperceptions of trade implications, especially by the NGO community. Embassy Bangkok used EEB and IIP outreach funds to support a risk communication workshop in 2009 (Ref A). While the workshop was well-received, there remain problems with acceptance of GMOs despite well publicized concerns over looming climate change effects. FAS Bangkok is considering a proposal, with which Embassy economic section would support, for a follow-up workshop where stakeholders could develop a risk communication strategy to move biotech forward.

BACKGROUND - RICE, FOOD SECURITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

13. The Asian Development Bank has identified Cambodia, Burma and Lao PDR as Asian countries most vulnerable to climate change. According to an International Food Policy Research Institute study, the Asia-Pacific region will experience the worst climate change effect on rice and wheat yields worldwide, and decreased yields could threaten the food security of 1.6 billion people in South Asia. USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) is considering programmatic responses to rice, climate change and food security, to include conducting forums that identify and promote agriculture strategies which promote climate change adaptation; examples include: promoting agro-forestry and integrated farming systems; promoting research; and conducting pilots for upland rice and other resilient crop varieties that withstand climate effects. Embassy Bangkok's proposed conference would seek to fit into USAID assessments and program strategies.

THE LOWER MEKONG INITIATIVE (LMI) AND FOOD SECURITY

14. Under LMI, the U.S. will collaborate with the Lower Mekong countries - Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam - in the areas of the environment and climate change, health, education and infrastructure development. (Ref E) Another foreign policy objective is global food security. Rice and other agricultural production in the four Lower Mekong nations is complicated by not only climate change, but also manmade water management plans. For example, Thailand plans large diversions of the Mekong River on its border, while Vietnam has made, and will continue to make, extensive channeling of Mekong water to enhance rice production. China, of course, also is planning several dams on the Mekong. Human engineering for rice production may have unintended negative consequences for the environment as well as rice production. For

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this reason, one of the LMI activities is development of a partnership between the Mekong River Commission and the Mississippi River Commission; lessons learned from Mississippi River management (with rice a major crop in Louisiana and other states) will help Mekong river management. As insecticide use in rice fields is extensive in some lower Mekong areas, such as the Mekong delta, the environmental benefits of GMOs could bring important allies from environment officials. With rice and other crop production a key element for the four nations, and the great promise that GMOs hold for rice production in the face of climate change, an outreach event that draws together these four countries, food security, rice and the environment in the context of science and biotechnology is a natural fit.

OUTREACH PROPOSAL

15. Embassy Bangkok, in collaboration with FAS, USAID/RDMA, Embassies Vientiane, Phnom Penh and Hanoi would hold a conference on "Agricultural Production, Climate Change and Biotechnology" for two days in the spring of 2010. The conference would review climate change predictions for rice and other crop production in the various aspects of rice farming - dry and wet season, rice paddy and dry land. Another presentation would relate rice and other crop production to food security for Asia. Another would review how manmade water management - irrigation diversions, canals, dykes and hydropower dams, will affect rice production. The conference would then move into the state of biotechnology for rice production in the U.S. and China, what biotech could offer for rice producers, and what the actual state of play is for rice biotech exports to, for example, Europe under WTO rules. Targeted participants would be a mix of scientists and government officials, the latter a mix of environment, water management, trade and agriculture officials.

PLANNED PARTNERS

16. Post plans to collaborate with various partners to give participants a range of considerations for how biotechnology intersects with other disciplines. A conference date not later than early April date would be preferred so that Embassy Bangkok can make use of its visiting Embassy Science Fellow, a USDA soil scientist, who can present on USDA knowledge and in particular, the synergy that soil mapping can bring to rice production for the lower Mekong countries. Under the LMI, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is

working to help model climate change and water management scenarios for the Mekong River basin, and a USGS speaker could advance the LMI while presenting on rice lessons learned from Louisiana and California water management. A biotechnology U.S. speaker from the IIP speaker program could cover the biotech presentation. Embassy Bangkok proposes to use the February visit of Senior Advisor Jack Bobo to help set the stage for a proposed conference, if accepted by EEB. Embassy Bangkok would plan to make use of in-house expertise with RDMA and FAS regional offices. Embassies Bangkok, Phnom Penh, Vientiane and Hanoi would cooperate to bring several key participants from each country.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

17. Per Ref C format:

- Cost \$20,000 in EEB funds for conference, to include site rental, air fare and hotels for 15 participants from the three other LMI countries; Post will seek IIP funding for two U.S. speakers and use Thai experts for other speakers.
- Target audiences: scientists and government officials in environment, agriculture, trade
- Ag-biotech issues to be addressed: rice production, climate change, water management
- How the project would help meet USG policy
- Objectives: take difficulties with biotech policy in lower Mekong countries and make positive connection with stakeholders other than rice exporters to show how biotech can help lower Mekong countries, the environment, food security and climate change preparations.
- Proposed length of program: two days or less as funds allow;
- IIP Speaker Program: yes, Post would want to use IIP
- Post responsible officer: ESTH Hub officer Hal Howard for State, howardhh@state.gov; (66) (2) 205-4712.

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18. Post would evaluate the success of this event by four methods:

(1) the number and quality of participants, (2) the results of an evaluation conducted at the conclusion of the event, (3) review of media coverage and analysis of whether the program influenced public perceptions, and (4) follow-ups with selected participants on how knowledge acquired at the seminar was applied in their policy and business decisions.

19. This proposal has been coordinated with Bangkok FAS and ESTHoffs in Embassies Phnom Penh, Vientiane and Hanoi.

JOHN